

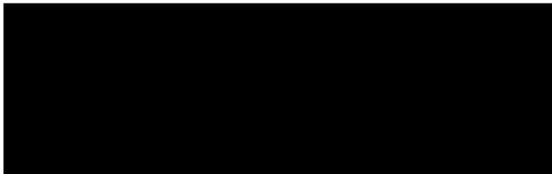
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U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Administrative Appeals Office (AAO)
20 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., MS 2090
Washington, DC 20529-2090



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

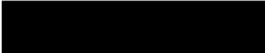
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Date: **MAY 07 2012**

Office: VERMONT SERVICE CENTER

FILE: 

IN RE: Petitioner:
Beneficiary:



PETITION: Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker Pursuant to Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:



INSTRUCTIONS:

Enclosed please find the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All of the documents related to this matter have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Please be advised that any further inquiry that you might have concerning your case must be made to that office.

If you believe the law was inappropriately applied by us in reaching our decision, or you have additional information that you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen. The specific requirements for filing such a request can be found at 8 C.F.R. § 103.5. All motions must be submitted to the office that originally decided your case by filing a Form I-290B, Notice of Appeal or Motion, with a fee of \$630. Please be aware that 8 C.F.R. § 103.5(a)(1)(i) requires that any motion must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider or reopen.

Thank you,

Perry Rhew
Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The Director of the Vermont Service Center denied the nonimmigrant visa petition and the matter is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed. The petition will be denied.

The petitioner filed this nonimmigrant petition seeking to employ the beneficiary in the position of business development manager as an H-1B nonimmigrant in a specialty occupation pursuant to section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b). The petitioner claims to be a luxury home rental services company established in 2009.

The director denied the petition based on the petitioner's failure to establish that it meets the regulatory definition of an intending United States employer. Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act; 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii).

The record of proceeding before the AAO contains: (1) Form I-129 and supporting documentation; (2) the director's request for additional evidence (RFE); (3) the petitioner's response to the RFE; (4) the notice of decision; and (5) Form I-290B and supporting materials. The AAO reviewed the record in its entirety before issuing its decision.

In the petition signed on December 14, 2009, the petitioner indicated that it wished to employ the beneficiary as a business development manager. In addition, the petitioner indicated that it had one employee and that it was established in 2009. The petitioner also submitted a copy of its Articles of Incorporation, which indicated that the beneficiary was the president, secretary and treasurer of the company. In addition, the Articles of Incorporation indicated that [REDACTED] was the vice president.

On December 22, 2009, the director issued an RFE requesting the petitioner to submit evidence that an employer-employee relationship exists between the petitioner and the beneficiary. Specifically, the director requested the petitioner to submit, *inter alia*, (1) evidence which clearly establishes who supervises and assigns work to the beneficiary, who has the authority to hire, fire, pay, and change the beneficiary's job duties, or otherwise control his or her work such as an organizational chart, employment contract, or any other document describing the beneficiary's claimed employment relationship with the petitioner; and (2) a statement concerning the beneficiary's influence on the business if he or she reports to a higher authority, whether it is intended that the beneficiary be an employee, and whether the beneficiary shares in profits, losses, and liabilities of the business.

On January 13, 2010, in response to the director's RFE, counsel for the petitioner submitted, in part, (1) an organizational chart; (2) a copy of *In Re: Petitioner*, EAC-94-145-52006, 1997 WL 33306049; and (3) a copy of *Matter of Aphrodite Investments Limited*, 17 I&N Dec. 530 (Comm'r 1980) (hereinafter *Aphrodite*). In addition, counsel stated that the beneficiary "is one of two employees and is the sole owner" of the company. Counsel also stated that the beneficiary will share in the profits, losses, and liabilities of the business in proportion to the shares owned. Counsel further stated that the petitioner's Board of Directors has the authority to hire, fire, pay, and change the beneficiary's job duties.

The director denied the petition on January 20, 2010.

On appeal, counsel claims that the Service's position "departs from longstanding binding precedent, ignores the plain language of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and its implementing regulations, thwarts Congressional intent respecting the purpose of the INA, and leads to absurd results." Counsel submits a copy of AILA Publication No. 10012760 – "Recent USCIS application of *National Mutual Insurance Company v. Darden*, 503 U.S. 318 (1992) and *Clackamas Gastroenterology Associates, P.C. v. Wells*, 538 U.S. 440 (2003) to nonimmigrant and immigrant visa petitions."

The primary issue before the AAO is whether the petitioner has established that it meets the regulatory definition of a United States employer as that term is defined at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). Specifically, as the petitioner has satisfied the first and third prongs of the definition of United States employer, the remaining question is whether the petitioner has established that it will have "an employer-employee relationship with respect to employees under this part, as indicated by the fact that it may hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of any such employee." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii).

Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act defines an H-1B nonimmigrant in pertinent part as an alien:

subject to section 212(j)(2), who is coming temporarily to the United States to perform services . . . in a specialty occupation described in section 214(i)(1) . . . , who meets the requirements for the occupation specified in section 214(i)(2) . . . , and with respect to whom the Secretary of Labor determines and certifies to the [Secretary of Homeland Security] that the intending employer has filed with the Secretary [of Labor] an application under section 212(n)(1)

The term "United States employer" is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) as follows:

United States employer means a person, firm, corporation, contractor, or other association, or organization in the United States which:

- (1) Engages a person to work within the United States;
- (2) *Has an employer-employee relationship with respect to employees under this part, as indicated by the fact that it may hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of any such employee; and*
- (3) Has an Internal Revenue Service Tax identification number.

(Emphasis added); *see also* 56 Fed. Reg. 61111, 61121 (Dec. 2, 1991).

Upon review, the AAO concurs with the director's decision. The record is not persuasive in establishing that the petitioner will have an employer-employee relationship with the beneficiary.

Applying the tests mandated by the Supreme Court of the United States for construing the terms "employee" and "employer-employee relationship," the record is not persuasive in establishing that the beneficiary will be an "employee" of the petitioner as the sole proprietor.

Although "United States employer" is defined in the regulations at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii), it is noted that the terms "employee" and "employer-employee relationship" are not defined for purposes of the H-1B visa classification. Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act indicates that an alien coming to the United States to perform services in a specialty occupation will have an "intending employer" who will file a Labor Condition Application with the Secretary of Labor pursuant to section 212(n)(1) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1182(n)(1) (2012). The intending employer is described as offering full-time or part-time "employment" to the H-1B "employee." Subsections 212(n)(1)(A)(i) and 212(n)(2)(C)(vii) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1182(n)(1)(A)(i), (2)(C)(vii) (2012). Further, the regulations indicate that "United States employers" must file a Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker (Form I-129) in order to classify aliens as H-1B temporary "employees." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(1), (2)(i)(A). Finally, the definition of "United States employer" indicates in its second prong that the petitioner must have an "employer-employee relationship" with the "employees under this part," i.e., the H-1B beneficiary, and that this relationship be evidenced by the employer's ability to "hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of any such employee." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) (defining the term "United States employer").

Neither the legacy Immigration and Naturalization Service ("INS") nor U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services ("USCIS") defined the terms "employee" or "employer-employee relationship" by regulation for purposes of the H-1B visa classification, even though the regulation describes H-1B beneficiaries as being "employees" who must have an "employer-employee relationship" with a "United States employer." *Id.* Therefore, for purposes of the H-1B visa classification, these terms are undefined.

The United States Supreme Court has determined that where federal law fails to clearly define the term "employee," courts should conclude that the term was "intended to describe the conventional master-servant relationship as understood by common-law agency doctrine." *Nationwide Mutual Ins. Co. v. Darden*, 503 U.S. 318, 322-323 (1992) (hereinafter "*Darden*") (quoting *Community for Creative Non-Violence v. Reid*, 490 U.S. 730 (1989)). The Supreme Court stated:

"In determining whether a hired party is an employee under the general common law of agency, we consider the hiring party's right to control the manner and means by which the product is accomplished. Among the other factors relevant to this inquiry are the skill required; the source of the instrumentalities and tools; the location of the work; the duration of the relationship between the parties; whether the hiring party has the right to assign additional projects to the hired party; the extent of the hired party's discretion over when and how long to work; the method of payment; the hired party's role in hiring and paying assistants; whether the work is part of the regular business of the hiring party; whether the hiring party is in business; the provision of employee benefits; and the tax treatment of the hired party."

Darden, 503 U.S. at 323-324 (quoting *Community for Creative Non-Violence v. Reid*, 490 U.S. at 751-752); see also *Clackamas Gastroenterology Associates, P.C. v. Wells*, 538 U.S. at 440 (hereinafter "*Clackamas*"). As the common-law test contains "no shorthand formula or magic phrase that can be applied to find the answer, . . . all of the incidents of the relationship must be assessed and weighed with no one factor being decisive." *Darden*, 503 U.S. at 324 (quoting *NLRB v. United Ins. Co. of America*, 390 U.S. 254, 258 (1968)).

Within the context of H-1B nonimmigrant petitions, when an alien beneficiary is also a partner, officer, member of a board of directors, or an owner of the corporation, the beneficiary may only be defined as an "employee" having an "employer-employee relationship" with a "United States employer" if he or she is subject to the organization's "control." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). The Supreme Court decision in *Clackamas* specifically addressed whether a shareholder-director is an employee and stated that six factors are relevant to the inquiry. 538 U.S. at 449-450. According to *Clackamas*, the factors to be addressed in determining whether a worker, who is also an owner of the organization, is an employee include:

- Whether the organization can hire or fire the individual or set the rules and regulations of the individual's work.
- Whether and, if so, to what extent the organization supervises the individual's work.
- Whether the individual reports to someone higher in the organization.
- Whether and, if so, to what extent the individual is able to influence the organization.
- Whether the parties intended that the individual be an employee, as expressed in written agreements or contracts.
- Whether the individual shares in the profits, losses, and liabilities of the organization.

Clackamas, 538 U.S. at 449-450; see also *New Compliance Manual*, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, § 2-III(A)(1)(d), (EEOC 2006).

Again, this list need not be exhaustive and such questions cannot be decided in every case by a "shorthand formula or magic phrase." *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 450 (citing *Darden*, 503 U.S. at 324).

In this matter, the Act does not exhibit a legislative intent to extend the definition of "employer" in section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, "employment" in section 212(n)(1)(A)(i) of the Act, or "employee" in section 212(n)(2)(C)(vii) of the Act beyond the traditional common law definitions. See generally 136 Cong. Rec. S17106 (daily ed. Oct. 26, 1990); 136 Cong. Rec. H12358 (daily ed. Oct. 27, 1990). On the contrary, in the context of the H-1B visa classification, the regulations define

the term "United States employer" to be even more restrictive than the common law agency definition.¹

¹ While the *Darden* court considered only the definition of "employee" under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 ("ERISA"), 29 U.S.C. § 1002(6), and did not address the definition of "employer," courts have generally refused to extend the common law agency definition to ERISA's use of employer because "the definition of 'employer' in ERISA, unlike the definition of 'employee,' clearly indicates legislative intent to extend the definition beyond the traditional common law definition." *See, e.g., Bowers v. Andrew Weir Shipping, Ltd.*, 810 F. Supp. 522 (S.D.N.Y. 1992), *aff'd*, 27 F.3d 800 (2nd Cir.), *cert. denied*, 513 U.S. 1000 (1994).

However, in this matter, the Act does not exhibit a legislative intent to extend the definition of "employer" in section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, "employment" in section 212(n)(1)(A)(i) of the Act, or "employee" in section 212(n)(2)(C)(vii) of the Act beyond the traditional common law definitions. Instead, in the context of the H-1B visa classification, the term "United States employer" was defined in the regulations to be even more restrictive than the common law agency definition. A federal agency's interpretation of a statute whose administration is entrusted to it is to be accepted unless Congress has spoken directly on the issue. *See Chevron, U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.*, 467 U.S. 837, 844-845 (1984).

The regulatory definition of "United States employer" requires H-1B employers to have a tax identification number, to employ persons in the United States, and to have an "employer-employee relationship" with the H-1B "employee." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). Accordingly, the term "United States employer" not only requires H-1B employers and employees to have an "employer-employee relationship" as understood by common-law agency doctrine, it imposes additional requirements of having a tax identification number and to employ persons in the United States. The lack of an express expansion of the definition regarding the terms "employee," "employed," "employment" or "employer-employee relationship" indicates that the regulations do not intend to extend the definition beyond "the traditional common law definition." Therefore, in the absence of an intent to impose broader definitions by either Congress or USCIS, the "conventional master-servant relationship as understood by common-law agency doctrine," and the *Darden* construction test, apply to the terms "employee," "employer-employee relationship," "employed," and "employment" as used in section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, section 212(n) of the Act, and 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h). That being said, there are instances in the Act where Congress may have intended a broader application of the term "employer" than what is encompassed in the conventional master-servant relationship. *See, e.g.,* section 214(c)(2)(F) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(c)(2)(F) (referring to "unaffiliated employers" supervising and controlling L-1B intracompany transferees having specialized knowledge); section 274A of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1324a (referring to the employment of unauthorized aliens).

Finally, it is also noted that if the statute and the regulations were somehow read as extending the definition of employee in the H-1B context beyond the traditional common law definition, this interpretation would likely thwart congressional design and lead to an absurd result when considering the \$750 or \$1,500 fee imposed on H-1B employers under section 214(c)(9) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(c)(9). As 20 C.F.R. § 655.731(c)(10)(ii) mandates that no part of the fee imposed under section 214(c)(9) of the Act shall be paid, "directly or indirectly, voluntarily or involuntarily," by the beneficiary, it would not appear possible to comply with this provision in a situation in which the beneficiary is his or her own employer, especially where the requisite "control" over the beneficiary has not been established by the petitioner.

Specifically, the regulatory definition of "United States employer" requires H-1B employers to have a tax identification number, to engage a person to work within the United States, and to have an "employer-employee relationship" with the H-1B "employee." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). Accordingly, the term "United States employer" not only requires H-1B employers and employees to have an "employer-employee relationship" as understood by common-law agency doctrine, it imposes additional requirements of having a tax identification number and to employ persons in the United States. The lack of an express expansion of the definition regarding the terms "employee" or "employer-employee relationship" combined with the agency's otherwise generally circular definition of United States employer in 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) indicates that the regulations do not intend to extend the definition beyond "the traditional common law definition" or, more importantly, that construing these terms in this manner would thwart congressional design or lead to absurd results. *Cf. Darden*, 503 U.S. at 318-319.²

Therefore, in the absence of an express congressional intent to impose broader definitions, both the "conventional master-servant relationship as understood by common-law agency doctrine" and the *Darden* construction test apply to the terms "employee" and "employer-employee relationship" as used in section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, section 212(n) of the Act, and 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h).³

The AAO notes that counsel for the petitioner indicates in response to the director's RFE that even if the beneficiary is the sole owner of the company, there is still an employer-employee relationship between the petitioner and the beneficiary pursuant to *Aphrodite*. In the past, the legacy INS considered the employment of principal stockholders by petitioning business entities in the context of employment-based classifications. However, these precedent decisions can be distinguished from the present matter.

The decisions in *Aphrodite* and *Matter of Allan Gee, Inc.*, 17 I&N Dec. 296 (Reg. Comm'r 1979) both conclude that corporate entities may file petitions on behalf of beneficiaries who have substantial ownership stakes in those entities. The AAO does not question the soundness of this particular conclusion and does not take issue with a corporation's ability to file an immigrant or a nonimmigrant visa petition. The cited decisions, however, do not address an H-1B petitioner's burden to establish that an alien beneficiary will be a bona fide "employee" of a "United States employer" or that the two parties will otherwise have an "employer-employee relationship." *See id.*; 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii).

² To the extent the regulations are ambiguous with regard to the terms "employee" or "employer-employee relationship," the agency's interpretation of these terms should be found to be controlling unless "plainly erroneous or inconsistent with the regulation." *Auer v. Robbins*, 519 U.S. 452, 461 (1997) (citing *Robertson v. Methow Valley Citizens Council*, 490 U.S. 332, 359, 109 S.Ct. 1835, 1850, 104 L.Ed.2d 351 (1989) (quoting *Bowles v. Seminole Rock & Sand Co.*, 325 U.S. 410, 414, 65 S.Ct. 1215, 1217, 89 L.Ed. 1700 (1945)).

³ That said, there are instances in the Act where Congress may have intended a broader application of the term "employer" than what is encompassed in the conventional master-servant relationship. *See, e.g.*, section 214(c)(2)(F) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(c)(2)(F) (referring to "unaffiliated employers" supervising and controlling L-1B intracompany transferees having specialized knowledge); section 274A of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1324a (referring to the employment of unauthorized aliens).

Although an H-1B petitioner may file a visa petition for a beneficiary who is its sole or primary owner, this does not necessarily mean that the beneficiary will be a bona fide "employee" employed by a "United States employer" in an "employer-employee relationship." See *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 440. Thus, while a corporation that is solely or substantially owned by a beneficiary is not prohibited from filing an H-1B petition on behalf of its alien owner, the petitioner must nevertheless establish that it will have an "employer-employee relationship" with the beneficiary as understood by common-law agency doctrine.

Therefore, in considering whether or not one will be an "employee" in an "employer-employee relationship" with a "United States employer" for purposes of H-1B nonimmigrant petitions, USCIS must focus on the common-law touchstone of "control." *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 450; see also 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) (defining a "United States employer" as one who "has an employer-employee relationship with respect to employees under this part, as indicated by the fact that it may hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of any such employee" (emphasis added)).

The factors indicating that a worker is or will be an "employee" of an "employer" are clearly delineated in both the *Darden* and *Clackamas* decisions. *Darden*, 503 U.S. at 323-324; *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 445; see also *Restatement (Second) of Agency* § 220(2) (1958). Such indicia of control include when, where, and how a worker performs the job; the continuity of the worker's relationship with the employer; the tax treatment of the worker; the provision of employee benefits; and whether the work performed by the worker is part of the employer's regular business. See *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 445; see also *New Compliance Manual*, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, § 2-III(A)(1) (adopting a materially identical test and indicating that said test was based on the *Darden* decision); see also *Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d 384, 388 (5th Cir. 2000) (determining that hospitals, as the recipients of beneficiaries' services, are the "true employers" of H-1B nurses under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h), even though a medical contract service agency is the actual petitioner, because the hospitals ultimately hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of the beneficiaries).

Moreover and as detailed above, in addition to the sixteen factors relevant to the broad question of whether a person is an employee, there are six factors to be considered relevant to the narrower question of whether a shareholder-director is an employee. See *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 449. These factors include whether the organization can hire or fire the individual; whether and to what extent the organization supervises the individual's work; whether the individual reports to a more senior officer or employee of the organization; and whether the individual shares in the organization's profits, losses, and liabilities. *Id.* at 449-450.

It is important to note, however, that the factors listed in *Darden* and *Clackamas* are not exhaustive and must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Other aspects of the relationship between the parties relevant to control may affect the determination of whether an employer-employee relationship exists. Furthermore, not all or even a majority of the listed criteria need be met; however, the fact finder must weigh and compare a combination of the factors in analyzing the facts of each individual case. The determination must be based on all of the circumstances in the relationship between the

parties, regardless of whether the parties refer to it as an employee or as an independent contractor relationship. See *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 448-449; *New Compliance Manual* at § 2-III(A)(1).

Furthermore, when examining the factors relevant to determining control, USCIS must assess and weigh each actual factor itself as it exists or will exist and not the claimed employer's right to influence or change that factor, unless specifically provided for by the common-law test. See *Darden*, 503 U.S. at 323-324. For example, while the assignment of additional projects is dependent on who has the *right to* assign them, it is the *actual* source of the instrumentalities and tools that must be examined, not who has the *right to* provide the tools required to complete an assigned project. See *id.* at 323.

In applying the test as outlined in *Clackamas*, the mere fact that a "person has a particular title – such as partner, director, or vice president – should not necessarily be used to determine whether he or she is an employee or a proprietor." *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 450; cf. *Matter of Church Scientology International*, 19 I&N Dec. 593, 604 (Comm'r 1988) (stating that a job title alone is not determinative of whether one is employed in an executive or managerial capacity). Likewise, the "mere existence of a document styled 'employment agreement'" shall not lead inexorably to the conclusion that the worker is an employee. *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 450. "Rather, as was true in applying common-law rules to the independent-contractor-versus-employee issue confronted in *Darden*, the answer to whether a shareholder-director is an employee depends on 'all of the incidents of the relationship . . . with no one factor being decisive.'" *Id.* at 451 (quoting *Darden*, 503 U.S. at 324).

Applying the *Darden* and *Clackamas* tests to this matter, the petitioner has not established that it will be a "United States employer" having an "employer-employee relationship" with the beneficiary as an H-1B temporary "employee." As explained above, the petitioner purports to be a company which is solely owned by the beneficiary. The AAO notes that counsel asserts in response to the RFE that the Board of Directors has the authority to hire, fire, pay, and change the beneficiary's duties, and submits a line-and-block organizational chart showing that the business development manager reports to the Board of Directors. However, counsel does not provide any information or evidence about the members of the Board. For instance, there is no indication that the beneficiary is not on the Board of Directors or that, if he is, that he does not have a controlling vote on the board. Even if that were the case, there is no indication that the beneficiary, as 100% owner of the petitioner, could not simply replace the Board of Directors if it makes any decision contrary to his wishes. Without documentary evidence to support the claim, the assertions of counsel will not satisfy the petitioner's burden of proof. The unsupported assertions of counsel do not constitute evidence. *Matter of Obaigbena*, 19 I&N Dec. 533, 534 (BIA 1988); *Matter of Laureano*, 19 I&N Dec. 1 (BIA 1983); *Matter of Ramirez-Sanchez*, 17 I&N Dec. 503, 506 (BIA 1980).

In addition, the Articles of Incorporation submitted with the initial petition indicates that the beneficiary is the president, secretary and treasurer. However, the petitioner indicates that it wishes to employ the beneficiary as a business development manager without any indication of the duties he would additionally be expected to perform as an officer of the corporation. It is incumbent upon the petitioner to resolve any inconsistencies in the record by independent objective evidence. Any attempt to explain or reconcile such inconsistencies will not suffice unless the petitioner submits

competent objective evidence pointing to where the truth lies. *Matter of Ho*, 19 I&N Dec. 582, 591-92 (BIA 1988). Doubt cast on any aspect of the petitioner's proof may, of course, lead to a reevaluation of the reliability and sufficiency of the remaining evidence offered in support of the visa petition. *Id.*

The petitioner also submitted a summary of oral contract between the petitioner and the beneficiary in response to the director's RFE. However, the contract is not dated or signed. The petitioner must establish eligibility at the time of filing the nonimmigrant visa petition. 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(1). A visa petition may not be approved at a future date after the petitioner or beneficiary becomes eligible under a new set of facts. *Matter of Michelin Tire Corp.*, 17 I&N Dec. 248 (Reg. Comm'r 1978). Nevertheless and as noted above, however, the "mere existence of a document styled 'employment agreement'" shall not lead inexorably to the conclusion that the worker is an employee. *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 450.

In view of the above, it appears that the beneficiary will be a proprietor of this business and will not be an "employee" having an "employer-employee relationship" with a "United States employer." It has not been established that the beneficiary will be "controlled" by the petitioner or that the beneficiary's employment could be terminated. To the contrary, the beneficiary *is* the petitioner for all practical purposes. He will control the organization; he cannot be fired; he will essentially report to no one; he will set the rules governing his work; and he will share in all profits and losses. Therefore, based on the tests outlined above, the petitioner has not established that it will be a "United States employer" having an "employer-employee relationship" with the beneficiary as an H-1B temporary "employee." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). The petitioner has simply failed to meet its burden of proof in this regard.

Accordingly, the petitioner has failed to establish that it qualifies as a United States employer with standing to file the instant petition. The appeal must be dismissed and the petition denied on this basis.

Beyond the decision of the director, even if the petitioner had established that it was a qualifying U.S. employer, the petitioner failed to establish that the proffered position is a specialty occupation.

Section 214(i)(1) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(i)(1), defines the term "specialty occupation" as an occupation that requires:

- (A) theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and
- (B) attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in the specific specialty (or its equivalent) as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) states, in pertinent part, the following:

Specialty occupation means an occupation which [(1)] requires theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge in fields of human endeavor including, but not limited to, architecture, engineering, mathematics, physical sciences, social sciences, medicine and health, education, business specialties, accounting, law, theology, and the arts, and which [(2)] requires the attainment of a bachelor's degree or higher in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), to qualify as a specialty occupation, a proposed position must also meet one of the following criteria:

- (1) A baccalaureate or higher degree or its equivalent is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the particular position;
- (2) The degree requirement is common to the industry in parallel positions among similar organizations or, in the alternative, an employer may show that its particular position is so complex or unique that it can be performed only by an individual with a degree;
- (3) The employer normally requires a degree or its equivalent for the position;
or
- (4) The nature of the specific duties [is] so specialized and complex that knowledge required to perform the duties is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree.

As a threshold issue, it is noted that 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) must logically be read together with section 214(i)(1) of the Act and 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). In other words, this regulatory language must be construed in harmony with the thrust of the related provisions and with the statute as a whole. *See K Mart Corp. v. Cartier Inc.*, 486 U.S. 281, 291 (1988) (holding that construction of language which takes into account the design of the statute as a whole is preferred); *see also COIT Independence Joint Venture v. Federal Sav. and Loan Ins. Corp.*, 489 U.S. 561 (1989); *Matter of W-F-*, 21 I&N Dec. 503 (BIA 1996). As such, the criteria stated in 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) should logically be read as being necessary but not necessarily sufficient to meet the statutory and regulatory definition of specialty occupation. To otherwise interpret this section as stating the necessary *and* sufficient conditions for meeting the definition of specialty occupation would result in particular positions meeting a condition under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) but not the statutory or regulatory definition. *See Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d 384, 387 (5th Cir. 2000). To avoid this illogical and absurd result, 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) must therefore be read as stating additional requirements that a position must meet, supplementing the statutory and regulatory definitions of specialty occupation.

Consonant with section 214(i)(1) of the Act and the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii), USCIS consistently interprets the term "degree" in the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) to mean not

just any baccalaureate or higher degree, but one in a specific specialty that is directly related to the proffered position. Applying this standard, USCIS regularly approves H-1B petitions for qualified aliens who are to be employed as engineers, computer scientists, certified public accountants, college professors, and other such occupations. These professions, for which petitioners have regularly been able to establish a minimum entry requirement in the United States of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, fairly represent the types of specialty occupations that Congress contemplated when it created the H-1B visa category.

To determine whether a particular job qualifies as a specialty occupation, USCIS does not simply rely on a position's title. The specific duties of the proffered position, combined with the nature of the petitioning entity's business operations, are factors to be considered. USCIS must examine the ultimate employment of the alien, and determine whether the position qualifies as a specialty occupation. *See generally Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d 384. The critical element is not the title of the position nor an employer's self-imposed standards, but whether the position actually requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in the specific specialty as the minimum for entry into the occupation, as required by the Act.

The petitioner states that it is a luxury home rental services company. In its letter of support dated December 11, 2009, the petitioner states that it requires the services of the beneficiary as a business development manager, and claims that his job duties will include, but are not limited to the following:

- Identifying, prioritizing, pursuing and closing new business opportunities in accordance with the company's established goals.
- Conduct detailed market research in order to identify potential markets within the high-end real estate rentals[,] and research and evaluate current markets to exploit future business opportunities.
- Coordinating and managing the implementation of service / rental agreements, designs and technical solutions within the internal areas of the company, and with related international companies.
- Develop and implement business and operational procedures to ensure the efficient operation of [the petitioner's] start-up company and develop systems for the management and control of expenses.
- Coordinating and managing the development of new business in South Florida.
- Development and modification of various marketing strategies to expand the company's clientele to include those customers interested in high-end luxury rentals.
- Implementing strategies to develop services in the United States.
- Research market conditions in local, regional, and national areas to determine potential sale of services.
- Conduct studies and evaluations on competitors, prices, sales, and methods of marketing and distribution.

- Determine the demand for services offered by the company and its competitors and identify potential clients within the South Florida region.
- Coordinating and managing recruitment and training for new potential business and marketing.

The petitioner also claims that the proffered position requires a bachelor's degree in business administration or related field. The petitioner submitted an evaluation of the beneficiary's educational credentials from the [REDACTED] in support of the contention that the beneficiary possesses the U.S. equivalent of a juris doctor degree. In addition, the evaluation finds that the beneficiary's education and employment experience is equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree in business administration.

The petitioner has failed to establish that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation under any of the criteria set forth under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A).

As a preliminary matter, it must be noted that the petitioner's claimed entry requirement of at least a bachelor's degree in "business administration" for the proffered position is inadequate to establish that the proposed position qualifies as a specialty occupation. A petitioner must demonstrate that the proffered position requires a precise and specific course of study that relates directly and closely to the position in question. Since there must be a close correlation between the required specialized studies and the position, the requirement of a degree with a generalized title, such as business administration, without further specification, does not establish the position as a specialty occupation. *See Matter of Michael Hertz Associates*, 19 I&N Dec. 558 (Comm'r 1988).

To prove that a job requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge as required by section 214(i)(1) of the Act, a petitioner must establish that the position requires the attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in a specialized field of study or its equivalent. As discussed *supra*, USCIS interprets the degree requirement at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) to require a degree in a specific specialty that is directly related to the proposed position. Although a general-purpose bachelor's degree, such as a degree in business administration, may be a legitimate prerequisite for a particular position, requiring such a degree, without more, will not justify a finding that a particular position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation. *See Royal Siam Corp. v. Chertoff*, 484 F.3d 139, 147 (1st Cir. 2007).⁴

⁴ Specifically, the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit explained in *Royal Siam* that:

[t]he courts and the agency consistently have stated that, although a general-purpose bachelor's degree, such as a business administration degree, may be a legitimate prerequisite for a particular position, requiring such a degree, without more, will not justify the granting of a petition for an H-1B specialty occupation visa. *See, e.g., Tapis Int'l v. INS*, 94 F.Supp.2d 172, 175-76 (D.Mass.2000); *Shanti*, 36 F. Supp.2d at 1164-66; *cf. Matter of Michael Hertz Assocs.*, 19 I & N Dec. 558, 560 ([Comm'r] 1988) (providing frequently cited analysis in connection with a conceptually similar provision). This is as it should be: otherwise, an employer could ensure the granting of a specialty occupation visa petition by the simple expedient of creating a generic (and essentially artificial) degree requirement.

In this matter, the petitioner claims that the duties of the proffered position can be performed by an individual with only a general-purpose bachelor's degree, i.e., a bachelor's degree in business administration. This assertion is tantamount to an admission that the proffered position is not in fact a specialty occupation. The director's decision must therefore be affirmed and the petition denied on this basis alone.

The AAO turns next to the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(1) and (2): a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent is the normal minimum requirement for entry into the particular position; and a degree requirement in a specific specialty is common to the industry in parallel positions among similar organizations or a particular position is so complex or unique that it can be performed only by an individual with a degree in a specific specialty. Factors considered by the AAO when determining these criteria include: whether the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL's) *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (hereinafter the *Handbook*), on which the AAO routinely relies for the educational requirements of particular occupations, reports the industry requires a degree in a specific specialty; whether the industry's professional association has made a degree in a specific specialty a minimum entry requirement; and whether letters or affidavits from firms or individuals in the industry attest that such firms "routinely employ and recruit only degreed individuals." See *Shanti, Inc. v. Reno*, 36 F. Supp. 2d 1151, 1165 (D. Minn. 1999) (quoting *Hird/Blaker Corp. v. Sava*, 712 F. Supp. 1095, 1102 (S.D.N.Y. 1989)).

The AAO recognizes the *Handbook* as an authoritative source on the duties and educational requirements of the wide variety of occupations that it addresses.⁵

A review of relevant sections of the *Handbook* demonstrates that, based on the description of duties provided by the petitioner, the proffered position encompasses the duties of a market research analyst as described in the 2012-2013 edition of the *Handbook* under the occupation of market research analysts as follows:

Market research analysts typically do the following:

- Monitor and forecast marketing and sales trends
- Measure the effectiveness of marketing programs and strategies
- Devise and evaluate methods for collecting data, such as surveys, questionnaires, or opinion polls
- Gather data about consumers, competitors, and market conditions

Id.

⁵ The *Handbook*, which is available in printed form, may also be accessed on the Internet, at <http://www.stats.bls.gov/ocol>. The AAO's references to the *Handbook* are to the 2012 – 2013 edition available online.

- Analyze data using statistical software
- Convert complex data and findings into understandable tables, graphs, and written reports
- Prepare reports and present results to clients or management

Market research analysts perform research and gather data to help a company market its products or services. They gather data on consumer demographics, preferences, needs, and buying habits. They collect data and information using a variety of methods, such as interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, market analysis surveys, public opinion polls, and literature reviews.

Analysts help determine a company's position in the marketplace by researching their competitors and analyzing their prices, sales, and marketing methods. Using this information, they may determine potential markets, product demand, and pricing. Their knowledge of the targeted consumer enables them to develop advertising brochures and commercials, sales plans, and product promotions.

Market research analysts evaluate data using statistical techniques and software. They must interpret what the data means for their client, and they may forecast future trends. They often make charts, graphs, or other visual aids to present the results of their research.

U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2012-13 ed., "Market Research Analysts," <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/Business-and-Financial/Market-research-analysts.htm#tab-2> (accessed April 25, 2012).

The *Handbook's* section pertaining to the educational requirements of this occupational category states:

Market research analysts need strong math and analytical skills. Most market research analysts need at least a bachelor's degree, and top research positions often require a master's degree.

Market research analysts need a bachelor's degree in market research or a related field. Many have degrees in fields such as statistics, math, or computer science. Others have a background in business administration, one of the social sciences, or communications. Courses in statistics, research methods, and marketing are essential for these workers; courses in communications and social sciences—such as economics, psychology, and sociology—are also important.

Many market research analyst jobs require a master's degree. Several schools offer graduate programs in marketing research, but many analysts complete degrees in other fields, such as statistics, marketing, or a Master of Business

Administration (MBA). A master's degree is often required for leadership positions or positions that perform more technical research.

Handbook, 2012-13 ed., "Market Research Analysts," <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/Business-and-Financial/Market-research-analysts.htm#tab-4> (accessed April 25, 2012).

In general, provided the specialties are closely related, e.g., chemistry and biochemistry, a minimum of a bachelor's or higher degree in more than one specialty is recognized as satisfying the "degree in the specific specialty" requirement of section 214(i)(1)(B) of the Act. In such a case, the required "body of highly specialized knowledge" would essentially be the same. Since there must be a close correlation between the required "body of highly specialized knowledge" and the position, however, a minimum entry requirement of a degree in two disparate fields, such as business management and engineering, would not meet the statutory requirement that the degree be "in *the* specific specialty."⁶ Section 214(i)(1)(b) (emphasis added).

Here, although the *Handbook* indicates that a bachelor's or higher degree is required, it also indicates that baccalaureate degrees in various fields are acceptable for entry into the occupation. In addition to recognizing degrees in disparate fields, i.e., social science and computer science as acceptable for entry into this field, the *Handbook* also states that "others have a background in business administration." As noted above, although a general-purpose bachelor's degree, such as a degree in business administration, may be a legitimate prerequisite for a particular position, requiring such a degree, without more, will not justify a finding that a particular position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation. See *Royal Siam Corp. v. Chertoff*, 484 F.3d at 147. Therefore, the *Handbook's* recognition that a general, non-specialty "background" in business administration is sufficient for entry into the occupation strongly suggests that a bachelor's degree *in a specific specialty* is not a normal, minimum entry requirement for this occupation. Accordingly, as the *Handbook* indicates that working as a market research analyst does not normally require at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for entry into the occupation, it does not support the proffered position as being a specialty occupation.

Furthermore, the AAO notes that the *O*NET* Summary Report for 19-3021.00 – Market Research Analysts, cited by counsel in response to the RFE, is insufficient to establish that the position qualifies as a specialty occupation normally requiring at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent. A designation of Job Zone 4 indicates that a position requires considerable preparation. It does not, however, demonstrate that a bachelor's degree in any specific specialty is required, and does not, therefore, demonstrate that a position so designated qualifies as a specialty occupation as defined in section 214(i)(1) of the Act and 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). See the *O*NET* Online Help Center, at <http://www.onetonline.org/help/online/zones>. Further, the Help Center's discussion confirms that Job Zone 4 does not indicate any requirements for particular majors or academic concentrations. See *id.* Therefore, despite counsel's assertions to the contrary,

⁶ Whether read with the statutory "the" or the regulatory "a," both readings denote a singular "specialty." Section 214(i)(1)(b) of the Act; 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). Still, the AAO does not so narrowly interpret these provisions to exclude positions from qualifying as specialty occupations if they permit, as a minimum entry requirement, degrees in more than one closely related specialty.

the *O*NET* information is not probative of the proffered position qualifying as a specialty occupation.

As the evidence of record does not establish that the particular position here proffered is one for which the normal minimum entry requirement is a baccalaureate or higher degree, or the equivalent, in a specific specialty closely related to the position's duties, the petitioner has not satisfied the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(1).

Next, the AAO finds that the petitioner has not satisfied the first of the two alternative prongs of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2). This prong alternatively requires a petitioner to establish that a bachelor's degree, in a specific specialty, is common to the petitioner's industry in positions that are both: (1) parallel to the proffered position; and (2) located in organizations that are similar to the petitioner. Again, factors often considered by USCIS when determining the industry standard include: whether the industry's professional association has made a degree a minimum entry requirement; and whether letters or affidavits from firms or individuals in the industry attest that such firms "routinely employ and recruit only degreed individuals." See *Shanti, Inc. v. Reno*, 36 F. Supp. 2d at 1165 (quoting *Hird/Blaker Corp. v. Sava*, 712 F. Supp. at 1102).

Here and as already discussed, the petitioner has not established that its proffered position is one for which the *Handbook* reports an industry-wide requirement for at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for entry into the occupation.

In support of its assertion that its degree requirement is common to the petitioner's industry in parallel positions among similar organizations, the petitioner submitted an advisory opinion letter from another luxury home rental services company. The letter claims that it is the industry standard to require a bachelor's degree in business administration or a related field for the position of business development manager. As previously discussed, a business administration degree requirement without any academic specialization is insufficient to establish a position as qualifying as a specialty occupation. As a result, even if this letter had been supported by corroboratory evidence, the petitioner has not established that similar companies in the same industry routinely require at least a bachelor's degree *in a specific specialty* or its equivalent for parallel positions.

In addition, the record is devoid of additional evidence such as job vacancy advertisements to demonstrate that a specialty degree requirement is common for parallel positions in similar organizations within the petitioner's industry. The petitioner, therefore, has not established eligibility under the first alternative prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2).

The petitioner also failed to satisfy the second alternative prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2), which provides that "an employer may show that its particular position is so complex or unique that it can be performed only by an individual with a degree." Here, the petitioner failed to sufficiently develop relative complexity or uniqueness as an aspect of the proffered position of business development manager.

Specifically, the petitioner failed to demonstrate how the duties of the business development manager, as described, require the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge such that a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent is required to perform them. For instance, the petitioner did not submit information relevant to a detailed course of study leading to a specialty degree and did not establish how such a curriculum is necessary to perform the duties of the proffered position. While one or two courses in marketing may be beneficial in performing certain duties of this business development manager position, the petitioner has failed to demonstrate how an established curriculum of such courses leading to a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, are required to perform the duties of the particular position here proffered.

Therefore, the evidence of record does not establish that this position is significantly different from other market research analyst positions such that it refutes the *Handbook's* information to the effect that there is a spectrum of preferred degrees for market research analyst positions, including degrees not in a specific specialty. In other words, the record lacks sufficiently detailed information to distinguish the proffered position as unique from or more complex than market research analyst positions that can be performed by persons without at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent. Consequently, as the petitioner fails to demonstrate how the proffered position of market research analyst is so complex or unique relative to other market research analyst positions that do not require at least a baccalaureate degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for entry into the occupation in the United States, it cannot be concluded that the petitioner has satisfied the second alternative prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2).

With regard to the third criterion of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), the petitioner has never hired other persons for the proffered position. The beneficiary will be the first employee to fill the proffered position. Therefore, the petitioner has not satisfied the third criterion of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A).⁷

Finally, the petitioner has not satisfied the fourth criterion of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), which is reserved for positions with specific duties so specialized and complex that their performance requires knowledge that is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent. Again, relative specialization and complexity have not been sufficiently developed by the petitioner as an aspect of the proffered position. In other words, the

⁷ While a petitioner may believe or otherwise assert that a proffered position requires a degree, that opinion alone without corroborating evidence cannot establish the position as a specialty occupation. Were USCIS limited solely to reviewing a petitioner's claimed self-imposed requirements, then any individual with a bachelor's degree could be brought to the United States to perform any occupation as long as the employer artificially created a token degree requirement, whereby all individuals employed in a particular position possessed a baccalaureate or higher degree in the specific specialty or its equivalent. *See Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d at 387. In other words, if a petitioner's degree requirement is only symbolic and the proffered position does not in fact require such a specialty degree or its equivalent to perform its duties, the occupation would not meet the statutory or regulatory definition of a specialty occupation. *See* § 214(i)(1) of the Act; 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) (defining the term "specialty occupation").

proposed duties have not been described with sufficient specificity to show that they are more specialized and complex than market research analyst positions that are not usually associated with at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent.⁸

As the petitioner has failed to satisfy any of the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), the petitioner has not established that the proffered position is a specialty occupation. For this additional reason, the appeal must be dismissed and the petition denied.

Also, beyond the decision of the director, the petition must be denied due to the petitioner's failure to provide a certified LCA that corresponds to the petition. Specifically, although the job title on the LCA submitted with the petition reads "Business Development Manager," it was certified for SOC (O*NET/OES) code 13-1111.00 - Management Analysts. The job as titled and as described by the petitioner, however, is classified under SOC (O*NET/OES) code 19-3021.00 – Marketing Research Analysts. As such, the petitioner was required to provide at the time of filing an LCA certified for SOC (O*NET/OES) code 19-3021.00, not SOC (O*NET/OES) code 13-1111.00, in order for it to be found to correspond to the petition.

While DOL is the agency that certifies LCA applications before they are submitted to USCIS, DOL regulations note that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (i.e., its immigration benefits branch, USCIS) is the department responsible for determining whether the content of an LCA filed for a particular Form I-129 actually supports that petition. *See* 20 C.F.R. § 655.705(b), which states, in pertinent part (emphasis added):

For H-1B visas . . . DHS accepts the employer's petition (DHS Form I-129) with the DOL certified LCA attached. *In doing so, the DHS determines whether the petition is supported by an LCA which corresponds with the petition*, whether the occupation named in the [LCA] is a specialty occupation or whether the individual is a fashion model of distinguished merit and ability, and whether the qualifications of the nonimmigrant meet the statutory requirements of H-1B visa classification.

⁸ It must be noted that the petitioner has designated the proffered position as a Level I position on the submitted Labor Condition Application (LCA), indicating that it is an entry-level position for an employee who has only basic understanding of the occupation. *See* Employment and Training Administration (ETA), *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance*, Nonagricultural Immigration Programs (Rev. Nov. 2009). Therefore, it is simply not credible that the position is one with specialized and complex duties, as such a higher-level position would be classified as a Level IV position, requiring a significantly higher prevailing wage. It is incumbent upon the petitioner to resolve any inconsistencies in the record by independent objective evidence. Any attempt to explain or reconcile such inconsistencies will not suffice unless the petitioner submits competent objective evidence pointing to where the truth lies. *Matter of Ho*, 19 I&N Dec. 582, 591-92 (BIA 1988).

The regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 655.705(b) requires that USCIS ensure that an LCA actually supports the H-1B petition filed on behalf of the beneficiary. Here, the petitioner has failed to submit a valid LCA that has been certified for the proper occupational classification, and the petition must be denied for this additional reason.

Finally, beyond the decision of the director, the AAO finds that even if the petitioner had established that it was a qualifying U.S. employer, the petitioner has not established that the beneficiary meets the petitioner's own requirement that the person who fills this position have at least a bachelor's degree in business administration or a related field. As indicated previously, the petitioner initially submitted a credential evaluation from [REDACTED], which states that the beneficiary's education is equivalent to a juris doctor degree and that a combination of her education and experience amount to the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in business administration. First, her educational credentials have not been evaluated as equivalent to a U.S. *bachelor's degree in business administration*. Second, the experience-based part of the evaluation does not meet the standard described in 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(1). For example, no documentation was provided to demonstrate that the evaluator has the authority to grant credit for training and/or work experience, which is the first requirement under this regulation. As such, the evaluation does not meet the standard of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(1) and the approval of the petition would have to be denied even if the petitioner had demonstrated, which it did not do, that it was a qualifying U.S. employer and that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation.⁹

The AAO conducts appellate review on a *de novo* basis. *See Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004). The petition will be denied and the appeal dismissed for the above stated reasons, with each considered as an independent and alternative basis for the decision. In visa petition proceedings, the burden of proving eligibility for the benefit sought remains entirely with the petitioner. § 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361. Here, that burden has not been met.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed. The petition is denied.

⁹ The AAO notes that a general degree in business administration alone is insufficient to qualify the beneficiary to perform the services of a specialty occupation, unless the academic courses pursued and knowledge gained is a realistic prerequisite to a particular occupation in the field. *Matter of Ling*, 13 I&N Dec. 35 (Reg. Comm'r 1968). The petitioner must demonstrate that the beneficiary obtained knowledge of the particular occupation in which he or she will be employed. *Id.* Thus, even if the petitioner had demonstrated that the proffered position requires at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent, the petition could not be approved, because the petitioner failed to demonstrate that the beneficiary has the equivalent of a bachelor's or higher degree in any specific specialty within the field of business directly related to market research.